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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000824

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SUBJECT: FOLLOW UP ON TUAREG INSURGENTS IN MALI
(C-AL8-00949)

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Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C/NF) The following responses are keyed to questions posed in Ref. A.

1A. (C/NF) HAVE TUAREG REBEL LEADER IBRAHIM BAHANGA AND ADC CHAIRMAN AG GHALI JOINED FORCES? There is no indication that Bahanga and Iyad ag Ghali have joined forces, although the extent to which the two ever drifted apart remains murky. Indications are that ag Ghali is playing both sides of the issue, straddling the Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) and Bahanga's Northern Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change (ATNMC) in order to maximize his own personal gain. Even though ag Ghali withdrew from the Tuareg political scene after President Amadou Toumani Toure granted his request for an assignment to the Malian consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, ag Ghali continues to cast a shadow over northern Mali. Many Tuaregs believe ag Ghali tacitly approved Bahanga's harassment of the Malian military simply because they see, whether correctly or not, ag Ghali's hand behind anything that occurs in the region of Kidal. At the same time, some Tuareg rebels are irked at what they view as ag Ghali's self-centered decision to abandon northern Mali during a time of crisis, leaving his Tuareg rebel colleagues in the lurch. While ag Ghali remains in close telephone contact with key Tuareg rebel leaders, it does not appear that ag Ghali played a significant role in recent negotiations between Mali, the ADC and Algeria in Algiers. There are some reports that ag Ghali is involved, from his post in Jeddah, in on going negotiations between Libya and Bahanga over the fate of Malian soldiers still in Bahanga's custody. Ag Ghali's involvement would not be surprising. Like the proverbial bad penny, ag Ghali turns up whenever a cash transaction between a foreign government and Kidal Tuaregs appears forthcoming. This was the case in 2003 when ag Ghali played a key role in securing the release of German tourists held hostage by the GSPC, and in March 2008 when Libya convinced Bahanga to release 22 Malian soldiers captured six months earlier. In both instances, ag Ghali likely received a percentage. If the Libyans paid Bahanga for the September 10, 2008, release of 44 more Malian soldiers, ag Ghali was likely lurking nearby.

1B. (C/NF) WHAT IS AG GHALI'S MOTIVATION TO JOIN BAHANGA? WHO HOLDS SWAY OVER AG GHALI? DOES HE CONSULT WITH TUAREG LEADERS WHO SERVE IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY? IS PRESIDENT TOURE COMMUNICATING WITH AG GHALI? HAS PRESIDENT TOURE ATTEMPTED TO PERSUADE AG GHALI TO RETURN TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE? Because ag Ghali is so adept at playing all sides of the Tuareg conflict to maximize his personal gain, we are not convinced that he has "joined" Bahanga per se. The nature of the ADC and ATNMC would suggest that if any joining occurs,

it would go the other way with Bahanga agreeing to abandon his own quixotic adventures and return to the ADC. The defection of several of Bahanga's key lieutenants (including Hassan Fagaga and Mohamed ag Aharib) back to the ADC in late August 2008 seem to support this assumption. Although one must be cautious not to place too much emphasis on the ethnic make-up of the various Tuareg rebel groups, the ADC comprises Tuaregs from a number of different ethnic groups and fractions and is therefore much more diverse and inclusive than the ATNMC which is composed largely of individuals from the Ifergoumessen fraction of Ifoghas Tuaregs. As an Ifoghas of the Kel Ireyakkan fraction, ag Ghali is more likely to stick with the ADC than gravitate toward the ATNMC.

B.1 (C/NF) Ag Ghali can be influenced, most notably by foreign governments like Algeria and Libya, but there is no indication of anyone either within the Tuareg hierarchy or the Malian government who holds sway over him. He is known as an independent and often inscrutable leader. He remains in telephone contact with many Tuareg rebel leaders, including ADC spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi, the two Intallah brothers, Bahanga and Fagaga. Of the four National Assembly Deputies from the region of Kidal (ag Bibi, Alghabass ag Intallah, Mohamed ag Intallah, and Deity ag Sidamou), only Alghabass appears to have the bearing, charisma and intelligence needed to rival ag Ghali. As the second son of the Kidal Tuareg's tradition leader, Alghabass has the pedigree needed to assume a larger leadership role. He is, however, only in his mid-30s and lacks ag Ghali's military and political credentials. There are several other Tuareg Deputies in the National Assembly - including Assembly vice-president Assarid ag Imbarcaouane from Gao and Hamato ag

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Bajan from Menaka - who are probably not in contact with ag Ghali since neither ag Imbarcaouane nor ag Bajan belong to any of the Kidal Tuareg groups currently opposing the Malian Government. Contacts report that President Toure is not communicating with ag Ghali and that there have been no attempts to recall ag Ghali from Jeddah to assist with the negotiation process mediated by Algeria.

1C. (C/NF) PRESIDENT TOURE APPEARS RELUCTANT TO ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH BAHANGA TO RESOLVE THE CRISIS. WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR HIS APPARENT LACK OF LEADERSHIP? Negotiating directly with Bahanga on any level would be extremely difficult. Bahanga has attacked Malian military units and bases, kidnapped Malian soldiers and civilian officials, and placed land mines around Tinzwaten that have killed an unknown number of Malian soldiers and civilians. He is also responsible for displacing civilians throughout the region of Kidal. In addition, Bahanga is extremely unpredictable and has repeatedly failed to abide by agreements to which he was a party. President Toure has told us, on several occasions, that Mali has no idea what Bahanga is even fighting for, that Bahanga has yet to articulate any political demands beyond those already expressed by the ADC regarding implementation of the Algiers Accords. Indeed, Bahanga's over-riding interest appears to be carving out Tinzwaten as a personal fiefdom to secure revenues from drugs, arms and cigarette trafficking. These factors make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to enter into direct negotiations with Bahanga. There is no indication that entering into direct negotiations with Bahanga would result in the liberation of the handful of Malian soldiers still in Bahanga's custody. Direct talks with Bahanga would likely exacerbate, rather than ease, tensions in Kidal. Erratic behavior by Bahanga does not absolve President Toure of any leadership failures. Yet it is important to note the distinct differences between President Toure's response to Tuareg unrest and the hard-line stance adopted by his colleague in neighboring Niger. Following the first ADC attacks against Malian military outposts in Menaka and Kidal in May 2006, President Toure delivered a speech to the nation that urged Malians to remember that those who attacked Menaka and Kidal represented just a tiny minority of northern Malians and that the vast

majority of Malian Tuaregs and Arabs are law-abiding citizens who, like southern Malians, are simply trying to feed their families and send their children to school. This speech was remarkable first for its tone, since one would have expected a President whose nation has just been ambushed by armed rebels to come out swinging; and second for its tack, as it urged reconciliation and peace, thereby immediately diffusing any fears of ethnic conflict or division. President Toure's response to increasing Tuareg unrest is consistent with the vision he articulated in May 2006.

C.2 (C/NF) WHY HAS BAMAKO BEEN SLOW TO INVESTIGATE AND IDENTIFY THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE 11 APRIL EXECUTION OF TWO TUAREG SOLDIERS NEAR KIDAL AND ONE IN SEPTEMBER NEAR GAO? This is a no-win situation for the Malian government. Kidal Tuaregs are convinced that Barka ag Cheikh and Mohammed ag Moussa were killed by the Malian military. If the Malians investigate and clear the Malian military of any wrong doing, Tuaregs will reject the inquiry as a sham. If an inquiry reveals military involvement, Tuaregs will demand those responsible be tried and punished. In October 2007 a group of Malian soldiers abducted and brutally murdered a Tuareg gendarme within the confines of the Malian military base in Gao. The gendarme was dragged into the military base, beaten and killed. Although those involved in the killing are well known to the Malian authorities, no charges have been filed and those who were detained after the murder were subsequently set free. If the Malian government is unable, or unwilling, to investigate and prosecute what on the surface appears to be a straight-forward murder case, chances for an investigation into a much more complicated murder are grim. As a result, Mali finds itself in a catch-22 with non-action or foot-dragging as perhaps the most palatable option.

1D. (C/NF) WHAT WAS PRESIDENT TOURE'S INTENTION WHEN HE LAUNCHED AIR STRIKES AGAINST BAHANGA AND HIS FORCES NEAR KIDAL IN EARLY APRIL-TO KILL BAHANGA? IS TOURE INCREASINGLY FOCUSED ON MILITARILY DEFEATING BAHANGA AS OPPOSED TO SEEKING A DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION? The April 2 air strike by two Hind-D helicopters about 25 KM south of Kidal was intended to dislodge Bahanga from positions blocking the road from Gao to Kidal. The air strike also created a diversion that allowed a resupply convoy to circumvent Bahanga and re-supply

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military encampments in Kidal. There is no indication that the Malian military was specifically trying to kill Bahanga. Indeed, one could argue that killing Bahanga would create more problems for President Toure than it would solve. One of the helicopters' Ukrainian or Bulgarian pilots was killed during the battle. This air strike was a targeted action and did not indicate a shift away from President Toure's stated goal of a peaceful and negotiated solution with Tuareg rebels. Recent negotiations in Algiers brokered by the Algerian government confirm that President Toure continues to focus on a non-military solution to the conflict.

1E. (C/NF) IF ALGIERS DECIDES TO NO LONGER BACK THE 2006 ALGIERS ACCORD, WHAT WOULD THAT MEAN IN TERMS OF PRACTICAL SUPPORT TO BAMAKO FROM ALGERIA? BESIDES OBSERVERS IN THE KIDAL REGION AND DIPLOMATIC CLOUT, WHAT DOES ALGIERS PROVIDE TO SUPPORT THE ACCORDS? A decision by the Algerian government to back away from the Algiers Accords would be surprising given that Algeria brokered the agreement and is still actively involved in seeking a path towards its full implementation. Algeria clearly hopes the mixed military units created by the Algiers Accords will combat AQIM. Beyond this, Algeria is regarded as a trusted, although often frustrating neighbor. Algeria has some ability to impose its will on Tuareg rebel leaders like Bahanga and force them back into line, at least for the short term. The Algerian and Malian governments share enough common interests - peace and stability in northern Mali, stronger border controls, and the elimination of terrorist safe-havens - to

ensure Algeria's position as a credible mediator.

¶F. (C/NF) HAVE EMBASSY OFFICERS IN BAMAKO OBSERVED LOGISTICAL AND MATERIAL COOPERATION BETWEEN BAHANGA AND TUAREG REBELS IN NIGER? No. None.

¶G. (C/NF) AT WHAT POINT WOULD BAMAKO CALL THE REBEL MOVEMENT IN NORTHERN MALI A FULL-SCALE REBELLION? The road map is Mali's 1991-1996 rebellion. The beginning and end of the 1990s rebellion is difficult to define. The same likely holds for the current situation. If attacks continue or expand, the starting date for what would be the third rebellion would likely be May 23, 2006. If violence is contained and the Algiers Accords implemented, the current unrest will be classified as just another period of instability similar to what prevailed in the late 1990s after the end of the second rebellion. The key difference between 2008 and the 1990s is that hostilities are currently limited to a specific group of Tuaregs based in the region of Kidal. The 1990s rebellion included an alphabet soup of rebel movements, each with their own acronym, that represented different Tuareg groups, Malian Arab groups and Songhrai movements. Alarm bells should start to ring the moment violence spreads to include a non-Tuareg group of rebels or bandits.

¶H. (C/NF) IF AVAILABLE, BIOGRAPHIC DATA ON BAHANGA, AG GHALI, AND FAGAGA WOULD BE GREATLY APPRECIATED. We forward any information that becomes available.
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